

Sent Dec. 20, 2018

A Message to Faculty and the MSK Alerts Distribution List*

Dear Colleagues,

As you know, the New York Times and ProPublica have been engaged in a series of stories that have attempted to raise questions around whether cancer institutes and their faculty, researchers, and physicians should work with industry in the broader healthcare community. As they continue to do this they remain almost exclusively focused on Memorial Sloan Kettering.

We are anticipating a similar story in the coming days from the same reporters attempting to make tangential connections between the work occurring at Memorial Sloan Kettering and the work that many of our faculty engage in outside of our institution. The running thesis appears to be that because some of our researchers and physicians serve on the boards of public companies, they are inherently conflicted in their responsibilities to Memorial Sloan Kettering. We expect the piece to question the ethics of some of our most accomplished researchers and clinicians. We want you to know that we reject these insinuations and we stand behind our faculty 100 percent.

Some facts that are important to know:

Scientific researchers and physicians have been working in partnership with industry for decades and Memorial Sloan Kettering is hardly unique in this regard. There are hundreds of researchers, physicians, university presidents, and executive leaders from cancer centers, academic medical institutions, universities, and hospitals across the country that serve on public, private, and scientific advisory boards. In fact, other cancer research institutes have a greater proportion of their faculty serving on outside public boards compared to MSK, despite incorrect assertions we expect from the forthcoming story.

But the truth is, when you have the best five-year cancer survival rate in the country, both our research scientists and physicians are highly sought after for their expertise and ability to improve our understanding and treatment of cancer. We make no apologies for that. We believe that this perspective ensures that when treatments, therapeutics, and medical equipment are being designed for patient care, the views and experiences of physicians and researchers are included in their design.

In most cases, the research scientists and physicians who are going to be identified in the story serve on boards that do not have any actual products on the market that would be used for patient care. A number of the faculty being identified also do not see patients as part of their responsibilities here at Memorial Sloan Kettering. Despite these facts, and despite conflict of interest reviews that were conducted before the faculty were permitted to serve on these boards, the reporters are attempting to suggest these relationships could have an impact on how patients are treated at Memorial Sloan Kettering.

There is clearly a field-wide debate occurring right now over transparency and the opaque rules that guide disclosure in medical journals. Researchers, journals, and non-profit research institutions are engaged in serious discussions on solving this problem. MSK has experienced its own challenges in this area, as have many other institutions, in part due to the shifting guidance researchers have received on disclosure standards. As you know, however, we have been conducting a full review of disclosure

policies to ensure that we are advancing cancer research in the most ethical and transparent way possible. And our task force is making strong progress on developing best practices to govern corporate board service, looking at both commitment and compensation.

We want to be abundantly clear that MSK stands firm behind our colleagues and our commitment to work with industry and to responsibly develop new scientific discoveries for the benefit of cancer patients. Our faculty are committed to personal integrity and professional ethics, with the singular focus of our mission. Central to that mission is our focus on taking basic science and developing it into lifesaving therapeutics to fight cancer — an accomplishment that can rarely happen in academia alone.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, please know that we are here to listen.

Sincerely,

Craig Thompson, Lisa DeAngelis, and Joan Massagué